

NANNUKAH PAGEANT

The joyous Festival of Lights (Hannukah) among the Jews is always the occasion of gala merry making with festivities of various degrees taking place among the world's Jewry. Perhaps the most ambitious one in the United States took place on Dec. 18th at the Chicago Civic Opera House, under the auspices of the Zionist Organization of Chicago. We'll pass up the first half of the program, consisting of a concert performed by big names imported from here and there. Personally, I thought there was too much of Mr. Joseph Bernstein (violinist) and Dr. Newman (conductor, both from Israel), but hardly enough of the Halevy Choral Society (Hyman Reznick, conductor) and Mr. Richard Tucker, a Metropolitan Opera Co. tenor, both of whom are excellent.

The second half consisted of a pageant written by Ben Aronin, a noted Jewish scholar and writer. The pageant was produced by Isaac Van Grove, who also wrote the fascinating musical score for the orchestra. Mr. Van Grove is an old hand at large scale productions of great appeal; he is the man who was responsible for the "Wheels A'Rolling" at Chicago's Railroad Fair during the past summer — the only good musical thing of the fair. Two other people contributed considerably to the success of the presentation, Mrs. Joan Woodruff, Van Grove and Mr. John Boyt. Some 300 people took part in the pageant, which was called "Thy Lamps — O, Israel".

The story centered around the present day celebration of Hannukah in Israel, with the "Menorah", an 8-branched candelabra as the focal object. The Festival of Lights commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, as well as the ridding from Israel of the Hellenic invaders and the cruel rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, by Judah Maccabee together with his Hasmonean brothers and a handful of Jewish followers. This year, with Jerusalem again the Capital of Israel, greater meaning on Hannukah was emphasized.

The pageant opened with a Tel Aviv plaza setting where the city's population, while awaiting of a relay arrival of the torch from a given point which is to light the Tel Aviv Menorah, spent their time dancing the horra and singing happily. Other dances follow (by especially trained groups who perform elaborately the Hey Harmonika and Akhshav). A procession, with children carrying palm fronds (or bullrushes), was followed by the town's mayor (the noted actor, Jacob Ben Ami) and the Cantor (Metropolitan's tenor, Richard Tucker) and the town's citizenry. While waiting for the arrival of the torch, one youngster curiously inquired of the mayor as to why and when was the first Menorah candle lit. Most picturesque scenes, highlighting snatches of the Jewish history, were then presented, telling the struggle of Jewish people and its fight to keep the "eternal Light" burning.

The first scene showed (behind a net screen) a majestic arcade of the Jewish temple, with the altar and the templar Menorah, with which the ancient priests were performing the ritual of the lighting of the candle. It showed the invasion of the Roman legions under Titus (70 A. D.) as well as the defilement and burning of the temple. The scene was extremely touching and the burning most effective. But even more stirring was Richard Tucker's chant of Lamentations. It sounded strange, eerie, yet soulful and moving. It no doubt brought tears to the people in the audience.

The second scene showed a group of priests with the sacred Torah, lamenting the fate that befell Israel and bemoaning the loss of the temple and the Menorah. But a fifth priest, Johanan Ben Zakkai (Andy Christian), declared that if Israel is to survive then their hearts must be the temple and the learning of the Torah (Pentateuch — Laws of Moses) must be the eternal fire of the Menorah.

The third scene took the audience to the court of King Fernando and Queen Isabela (Los Reyes Catolicos) of Spain in 1492. The scene opened with an elaborate and highly choreographed Pavan, which performance alone impressed upon the people the glamor, elegance and haughtiness of the court of Spain. The king and queen were flanked by the Dominican Friar, Torquemada, a cardinal, and other members of the retinue. Don Isaak Abarbanel, an influential Spanish Jew and an erstwhile personal friend of the Royal couple, came to plead the cause of the Jews who were to be expelled from Spain, the land where they lived even before there ever was a Spain. This scene, as well as all the pro-Jewish scenes, were played by an almost entirely gentile cast. It was interesting to note, therefore, how convincingly successful they were in presenting the Jewish case of a dark period in their history.

The following scene was one in American history, portraying Hyam Solomon and other Jews coming to the rescue of George Washington with financial aid when Washington was in a tight spot during the Revolutionary War — "the Jews gave for the sake of Liberty that the Menorah may continue to burn in the land of the free."

The scene that brought the house down was simple and wordless — a Hassidic scene. It portrayed Vyt's Beliajus as a Rebbe and his retinue of four Hassidim (Mrs. Tana Tovar and her children, Lolita, Chatita and Conrad). The first dance was a processional to a Nigun. Then Beliajus soloed to "Dudele", which song Richard Tucker sang as Beliajus danced. The song dealt with the bewilderment of the Rebbe (A Hassidic Rabbi) at the presence of God everywhere. No move can be made without finding His Divine presence. It closed up with a "Molto Allegro" part. The applause was thunderous and deafening. The audience and all principals and leaders deemed it the highlight of the evening.

There was another scene with Theodore Herzl, founder of Zionism which, eventually, led to the statehood of Israel. Finally the torch arrived. There was a massed parade of hand Menorahs all lit which made a most effective picture. A massed parade of Jewish flags took place, carried by young men, several of whom were actual Haganah members who fought in Palestine. The huge Menorah in the plaza was lit with special ritual and chant by Mr. Tucker and the Halevy choir. The Jews seem to have an elaborate ritual which lends easily to pageantry and the finale was perfect.

A FOLK DANCE TELEVISION SHOW IN S. F.

The Madelynne Greene, Virgil Morton and David Allen trio opened a half hour television program over station KPIX which takes place on Thursdays at 7:15 to 7:45. The Festival Workshop is featured, but two guest folk dance groups appear at each presentation.

The above trio, under the title of the "Wayfarers", presented during December 10-11 a very successful program of ballads in dance which received excellent reviews.



Norman Kades and Lucille Zaikis of Los Angeles, Cal., enjoying their Suktinis. Mrs. Zaikis is the leader of the L.A. Lithuanian folk dancers. Though the group is small they represent the Lithians at festivals and civic events with dances well performed.

VASHI AND VEENA HINDU PROGRAM

The Hindustani Students Association presented a program of Hindu dances on November 19th at Mandel Hall of the University of Chicago. The dancers were the noted husband-wife team Vashi and Veena. Both portrayed the suppleness and grace which is requisite in the Hindu dance and which is seldom mastered by Western dancers. Nataraj Vashi, besides the attributes of grace, possesses a beautiful body of masculine proportions and most penetrating eyes which seemed to glitter even in dimness. Veena charmed not only with palpitating and feminine softness in movement and carriage, but also with her lovely face which seemed to belong to a benign Deva of Hindu mythology. They presented seven numbers, mostly solos by either of the two. The costumes were varied and rich and every dance was flawless in presentation. But the dances which will perhaps linger longest in the memory of the spectators are: Shringar-a portrayal by Veena of a damsel in her boudoir; Arjuna — the Archer — whom Vashi portrayed; Vanjara — a truly delightful number portraying Hindu gypsies in their unique costumes and danced by Vashi and Veena. The Trimurti was their big number which lasted about (or over) 15 minutes. This was a dance representing the Hindu Trinity and their attributes (Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Shiva, the Destroyer). To the Western lay person this number was too deep. The Mudras (gestures) meant nothing and the complex story of the doings of the Hindu Gods was above our head, yet, all were entranced and charmed with whatever and however they performed. Nirvana — which represents the equivalent of a Christian heaven, which to the Hindu is the final goal after the souls' wandering through many rebirths and reincarnations and life of denial of temptations, — conveyed the solemn peace and beauty even to the audience.

During the evening, Guarang Yodh, Gopal Basu and Bhatodekar, appeared twice to play Hindu melodies on the Sitar, flute and Tabolas. The audience accorded their well executed renditions with sincere and voluminous applause.

A LITH HIT IN VANCOUVER, B. C.

Annually the Canadian Folk Society of Vancouver, British Columbia, on Canada's Pacific coast, presented

their folk festivals, but this was the first time in which a Lithuanian group participated. Previously there were hardly any Lithuanians on the Canadian Pacific, but with the recent large influx of Baltic DP's many settled in British Columbia also, and this year they took part in the festivities in which 30 other ethnic groups participated.

The Lithuanian appearance made quite a stir. They were most heavily applauded by the public while the newspapers wrote them up in flattering colors and three pictures appeared of the group in the "News Herald". The Lithuanian group demonstrated "Lenciugelis" and "Malunas", both very colorful numbers. The Lithuanians also had a handi-craft exhibit. Miss Doma Kaunas is their folk dance instructor and Mr. Emilis Smilgis was the director of the Lithuanian section.

FOLK FESTIVAL COUNCIL IN CLEVELAND

You will be interested to know that I have finally got an organization started. I call it the Folk Festival Council and it is much the same as the Federation plan, but without the doubtful features of the latter. It is composed so far of five groups, dancing and singing groups, and it is hoped that from time to time we will invite more to join. I believe in starting small and quietly and letting the organization grow by itself. One of the member groups is that wonderful Lithuanian Chorus just arrived from the DP camps. They are really magnificent — Hurok admits they are as good as the Don Cossak Chorus. We are lucky to have them here. I was very surprised to know that they are substantially the same group that I saw at the London Festival in 1935. Miss Baronas is not with them, unfortunately. She is now in Australia. The Council's first meeting is to be a party at Ukrainian Hall and the Ukrainian Dancers Guild are to be the hosts. Added to the dance exhibition will be an exhibit of arts and crafts — embroidery, weaving, painted Easter eggs, translations of Shevchenko's poetry, typical native foods and perhaps a teaching session of one two simple Ukrainian dances. Nick Boyko is the man behind all this and he is doing a wonderful job. This is only the beginning. We plan to have the Mexicans entertain us in February, and the Irish some time near St. Patrick's Day. Leonard Austin